

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ANIMAL PRODUCTION FOOD SAFETY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Conference on Animal Production Food Safety (APFS) was held on September 6-7, 2000 in St. Louis, Missouri. The Conference was jointly sponsored by five USDA agencies with food safety responsibilities, two HHS agencies with food safety responsibilities, one consumer organization, and 23 animal industry and professional organizations. (See list of Conference sponsors)

Key areas addressed during the Conference were 1) research 2) education and 3) quality assurance.

A keynote presentation was given by Dr. Douglas Powell, University of Guelph, on “The Importance of Addressing Food Safety at the Animal Production Level”. This provided a foundation for the remainder of the two-day conference. Dr. Powell pointed out the absolute necessity of developing food safety interventions at the animal production level, because a portion of the hazards that are associated with animal-source foods are found in live animals and can only be addressed adequately at that link in the food chain. He indicated that in addition to adopting practices to reduce the foodborne hazards as much as possible, producers must manage their production in an organized manner so that food-safe practices can be documented. This is necessary, he said, in order to produce the safest foods possible and to proactively address concerns often associated with products suspected or shown to cause foodborne illness in humans. In short, his message was: do the right thing to produce safe food, document those efforts, and get the word out to consumers and the general public that you are adequately addressing food safety in the animal products that you produce.

After the keynote presentation, there followed background presentations on Animal Production Food Safety from the perspectives of government, food animal producers, and consumer interest groups. There was also a presentation that outlined the food safety roles of producers, veterinarians, and universities.

The remainder of the morning session was devoted to overview presentations of industry Quality Assurance Programs (QAP) for the major

industries producing meat, milk, and eggs. These presentations provided a view of the large body of quality assurance activity under way in the food animal industries, and an opportunity to compare the relative progress made by each commodity's QAP.

Luncheon presentations were given each day of the conference and reiterated the government food safety agencies' commitment to providing a seamless, farm to table national program for food safety. Government officials also renewed support for a voluntary approach to food safety on the farm and acknowledged the importance of research, education, and quality assurance to those efforts. They indicated an interest in working cooperatively with researchers, veterinarians, academia, and food animal producers to assure that consumers receive the safest animal-source foods possible.

The afternoon session on September 6 included reports on federal agency activities in APFS. The program then focused on research updates for a variety of subjects involving chemical and microbiological hazards that may occur on the farm, and potential interventions to reduce or eliminate those hazards.

In the first session of the second day of the conference, September 7, the participants were divided into five breakout groups on APFS education that discussed:

- Third party certification of animal production programs,
- Delivering food safety educational messages to animal producers,
- Measuring the impact of industry Quality Assurance Programs,
- Developing state networks for supporting APFS initiatives, and
- Importance of animal identification in addressing food safety

A second session had participants divided into seven breakout groups considering research gaps in APFS for each of the species producing meat, milk, or eggs.

Both the education and research breakout groups were well attended, and active input and discussion was evident in all sessions. When the group reports were presented on the final afternoon, some common concerns and suggestions emerged. These can be divided into three categories: producer concerns, roles of government, and other recommendations.

Producer Concerns

- Practices that enhance food safety must be feasible and cost-effective
- There should be financial and other incentives for food animal producers to adopt safe production practices
- Federal agencies should consider cost-sharing to encourage producer adoption of production practices that contribute to food safety
- A negative regulatory climate sometimes prevents active pursuit of APFS objectives
- Producers need some mitigation of liabilities involved in identification and management of food safety hazards
- Federal agencies should help articulate the benefit of Quality Assurance Programs to consumers

Roles of Government

- Coordinate APFS activity in research and education among agencies
- Provide more funding for APFS research and education
- Federal government should set standards and provide uniform systems
- Federal government should provide APFS training, e.g. training of veterinarians in audit processes
- Federal agencies should provide verification of programs/processes
- State governments should assist industry in carrying out APFS programs

- Identify a consistent core message for APFS and share it across commodity groups
- Relevant databases should be shared among state and federal agencies and industry where feasible

Other Recommendations

- More partnerships should be formed among government/academia/industry
- More research is needed into the ecology of foodborne pathogens
- Additional research and education is needed in antimicrobial resistance and its management
- Third party certification is a necessary part of APFS programs
- FARAD and similar programs should be adequately funded and supported

Conference Highlights as observed by Moderator of Group Reports, Dr. Lester Crawford, Georgetown Center for Food and Nutrition Policy

- Sense of community among diverse participants in the conference
- Industry attitude: “If we have scientific basis for safe food production practices, we will adopt those practices”
- We must work together to improve the regulatory climate to the end that it supports, rather than impedes, progress in APFS
- Our food-safe production programs/practices must have international congruence
- Third party certification is necessary for Quality Assurance Programs
- Laboratory verification is a necessary element of APFS
- Antibiotic resistance/prudent drug use deserve increased attention

- Food Safety Objectives may provide the basis for future progress

The common view, as confirmed by analysis of conference evaluations by attendees, was that the National Conference on Animal Production Food Safety provided a valuable opportunity for sharing information, concerns, and constructive ideas among a variety of industry, consumer, academia, and government participants. The conference identified a number of specific priority needs in the APFS arena. These findings will serve as valuable guidelines to industry, government, and academia as we move forward with joint efforts to provide to consumers and trading partners the safest possible foods of animal origin.